



Government Submission

Federal Senate Inquiry into women in Sport and Recreation in Australia

June 2006

Committee Secretary
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
References Committee
Department of the Senate
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ECITA Committee,

Please accept this submission regarding the Federal Senate Inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia submitted by VicSport on behalf of members of Victoria's sport and recreation sector.

VicSport is the Peak for Sport in Victoria. As an independent member based body VicSport represents the concerns of over 170 sport and recreation organisations. VicSport's membership includes State Sports Associations, Regional Sports Assemblies, University Sports Organisations and the associated membership bases of these organisations.

As the Peak for Sport and Recreation in Victoria VicSport presents this submission raising issues of concern specific women is sport and recreation.

On behalf of our sector I thank you for taking the time to consider the issues raised in this submission. Should you have any queries or wish to discuss any issues further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Kate Roffey

Kate Roffey
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VicSport - The Sports Federation of Victoria

Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee

Response to the Inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia

VicSport – The Sports Federation of Victoria

The following submission provides comment on a selection of issues VicSport members found particularly important to their sports. Covering in depth all the issues affecting women's participation in sport and recreation raised in the terms of reference is a mammoth task beyond the scope of any single organisation. This submission focuses on a number of specific issues, which, while they are highly relevant in their impact, do not often receive the attention they deserve in broader women in sport discussions.

Health

The debate over the importance of the role physical activity plays in the promotion of better health outcomes is null and void. The effects of physical inactivity reach far beyond the health of an individual alone. The rapidly escalating increase in the incidence rate of obesity and the impact this is having on the general health of Australians, along with the associated cost to the health system, (the Department of Health and Ageing estimated the cost of treating major over-weight and obesity related illnesses in 1996 was between \$680 and \$1239 million), has received much attention recently.

It has been proven time and time again in study after study; physical activity improves both physical and mental health, and reduces the risk of heart disease, over-weight and obesity, stroke, diabetes, osteoporosis and mental health problems. The recently released Pfizer Australia Health Report indicates physical inactivity is second only to smoking as the biggest factor contributing to the poor health of women. Given the benefits of exercise on both physical and mental health are beyond question, it is imperative more women are provided with suitable access opportunities to get physically active.

Unfortunately, despite the unequivocal realisation obesity is a social problem which must be dealt with; there has been little significant input in terms of either funding

support or policy direction from government at any level to assist in implementing the broad strategies required to attempt to promote grass-roots participation as a means of combating this problem.

This means more pathways providing participation opportunities specifically addressing the wants and needs of women must be encouraged at all levels. The mind boggles to even begin to imagine what the sport and recreation sector could do with \$680 million to promote physical activity participation opportunities at all levels!

Feedback from VicSport members indicated in addition to the benefits of simply being physically fit, major motivators for women's participation in sport were the social interaction and human contact these participation opportunities provided. In many cases feedback indicated the mental health benefits derived from this interaction was at least as important, if not more important than the physical benefits themselves.

Feedback from the Victorian Ladies Bowl's Association (VLBA) for example indicated social interaction was the primary reason women participated in their sport. In fact the social interaction these ladies were exposed to via their sport was for many, particularly those in older age groups, the only social interaction they experienced on an ongoing basis. For these ladies the networks of contacts and the opportunity to be involved with others was an experience considered vital to their general well-being.

One interesting anomaly raised by the VLBA was the drop off in participation rates amongst older ladies with the arrival of grand children. Evidence suggests many adult women often undergo the most physically active phase of their life when they have children under five. At this time women find they are often working reduced hours or not working at all in order to balance family commitments and as such have more disposable time for recreation. One of the key issues raised in any context –work or sporting – when discussing children is access to child care. Given the drop off rate amongst older ladies this is a consideration which needs to be extended beyond the immediate family only.

In the context of the VLBA experience we must be cognisant of the impact lack of access to appropriate and affordable child care resources has not only on parents, but on the extended family as well.

Accessibility

As outlined below a number of issues were raised in regard to women's participation in sport and other physical activities.

Family Commitments

The impact family has on a mother's decision to remain involved in sport; particularly in highly competitive and elite sport was raised. Feedback from a former elite international athlete who is now a mother of two indicated it is possible

to have children and continue playing, however as with any occupation it is difficult to combine motherhood and work or sport and many sacrifices need to be made.

There are many examples of women who have managed to strike a balance and having had children have successfully returned to play elite level sport. In these cases the attitude of the sport organisation itself which has played a key role in allowing a mother to continue to play and many sports, for example basketball, netball and golf, are highly supportive of women who choose to balance motherhood and a career in sport.

As noted above, at the non-elite level, the early motherhood years often offer women opportunities to become involved in sport and recreation activities previously not available when these women were engaged in full time work, and some of the more forward thinking members of the sector, such as fitness centres and swimming pools, saw the opportunity to capture a greater participation audience by offering child-minding options. The growth in popularity of young mothers membership at fitness centres who offer child care facilities provides sound testimony to the value of providing supportive environments.

In addition, some sport and recreation groups have developed specific 'Mums and Bubs' classes and similar programs at their facilities to provide access for new mothers. Not only has this created new pathways for women to be involved, it has also benefited these centres themselves by increasing usage during times which had previously been considered dead times.

While many large fitness centres and indoor swimming pools have the financial capacity to include a crèche within their centre, this is certainly not the case for most sport and recreation organisations, particularly community based groups. While it is acknowledged the provision of affordable child-minding facilities would allow not only participants but also athletes, coaches and administrators to remain active in their roles while children are young, the reality is the costs of running such centres is beyond the capacity of all but a few organisations.

A possible strategy recommended as a means of providing cost effective child care for the sport and recreation sector was to encourage private organisations to provide affordable and accessible facilities across the sport and recreation sector by providing such groups with specific government assisted subsidises.

Provision of Facilities

Outside of child-care facilities specifically, the current level of accessibility to facilities in general was raised as a major issue for women. As was highlighted in a recent research report into Women's Participation and Facility Access completed by VicSport and Womensport and Recreation Victoria, the best facilities are not necessarily those with the best buildings or grounds, but rather those catering for the needs of a wide cross section of society, including those of women. Unfortunately, despite the era of equality and inclusivity in which we live, there are realistically still very few facilities genuinely accessible for women.

At the time when the majority of our current facilities were designed and built, participation was strongly dominated by males, and sports grounds and amenities were built with little thought for female and cross-cultural needs.

As female participation numbers in sport are increasing, particularly in traditionally male dominated sports, (ABS statistics show Victoria has seen an increase of around 6% in female participation in organised activity, while a 21% increase in women's soccer from 1998-2000 was recorded), the fact facilities still cater primarily for males is becoming an increasing problem.

Results of research into Victorian Western region sport facilities (2000) showed

"Whilst a number of sports catered well for women, the availability and condition of facilities especially for growth sports (such as women's soccer and women's rugby) are disincentives for women who want to play."

The quality and quantity of facilities was a major concern raised by several members of the focus group. As one respondent noted;

"Most soccer clubs in Victoria have a clubhouse at their ground. The biggest problem regarding these clubhouses is the lack of toilet and change room facilities, and in most cases there is only one change room available which is used by the men/boys teams - leaving the women to use public toilet blocks as change rooms where these are available. The lack of change rooms is especially a problem in the juniors where many teams are involved in mixed competition."

While the provision of separate change rooms with adequate space and of an acceptable standard may seem like a basic expectation, across Victoria, and most certainly in regional and rural areas, the provision of appropriate female change facilities is the exception rather than the rule. In fact this specific issue has become such a large scale problem the Victorian State Government has this year committed \$6million for country football and netball clubs to improve playing surfaces and upgrade shared sporting facilities.

Experience has proven however with some forethought and planning the issue of meeting women's need can be successfully managed. As a case in point one particular Victorian Local Government Authority (LGA) operates under a clearly defined framework which stipulates the allocation of facilities to under-represented groups, including women, to ensure imbalances are redressed. By putting in place such a policy, which includes the development of facilities specifically for women's use only, and ensuring facilities adequately meet the needs of both male and female users, this LGA will be in a better position to cater for an anticipated increase in women's participation rates in the future.

Playing and Training Access

Access to change rooms and other amenities is however not the only issue around facility access. Without doubt participation numbers have risen dramatically since most community sport and recreation facilities were built and as a result, the finite number of facilities available for use can no longer meet demands from growing numbers of participants. As a result some groups must miss out and in many cases the ones to miss out are the women's sports.

A number of strategies to combat the problem of equity of access have however been successfully implemented. As an example one LGA, as part of their policy to provide facilities appropriate for female use, one particular council developed a facility exclusively for women's sport in their locality to cater for a range of sports such as soccer, cricket, football and touch football. This facility was known for its superior quality of the fields with many men's clubs wanting to make use of the facility. This same council has kept to its policy of providing female accessible facilities at all their centres, and in one case when new clubrooms were being built at a facility owned by this council, they were built to cater for both male and female members despite the fact the facility was currently being used by men's teams only. In this case the Council's policy of ensuring equal access has paved the way for potential female use of this facility in the future.

An alternative option used with some success has been the offering of an entry fee concession to clubs with women's teams participating in local competition. Offering such a concession promotes awareness of the need to encourage clubs to make women's sport a priority. Once a strong women's presence at the club has been established and the value of broader access for all is realised these concessions could be removed without detriment to women's access.

A number of Victorian LGA's have also introduced the use of service agreements, to allow them to be more assertive in the allocation of fields for use by women's teams. This has been achieved by including clauses in Service Agreements, which stipulate that minority groups must occupy a certain percentage of use of the facility.

As a result, when women have to compete with men for available times, they are often allocated non-prime time access which creates conflicts with other priorities such as family time, work or study commitments. This is often particularly the case at older well established clubs which have a strong history of male dominated participation. In these clubs the men's teams receive the higher priority when programming issues such as ground and facility allocation for training and match play arise.

Some clubs and councils are leading by example and are showing their female teams and participants are a priority and they are given equal opportunity. Not surprisingly evidence shows many of these groups have a strong female representation at all levels within their structure, including at the management and /or committee level and this has played a key role in equitable facility access.

Media

Lack of media coverage is not a new issue for women's sport – in fact it is not a new issue for many sports. When you consider all but a handful of sports in general, including men's sports, receive any media coverage at all it is not surprising women's sports lose out in the struggle for air time.

One of the main concerns raised by groups in regard to developing a stronger media presence for both their sport in general and their female athletes was the lack of expertise they have in the media and promotions area, and more importantly a lack of resources available to appoint media personnel to focus on building public relations.

Sport and recreation is a sector still largely run by volunteer resources and is generally lacking in excessive financial resources. If we are to realistically see some change in media coverage for women the change must be, if not driven by, at the very least supported by the media itself.

Creating an ethos and equity amongst the media is at best a difficult task and one which would require some significant government intervention. A number of options have been canvassed in regard to government intervention strategies. The most commonly argued is for legislation to be implemented similar to that which outlines Australian content requirements in order to set down minimum quotas for women's sport coverage. While this option may produce the desired result of increasing women's sport coverage, there is little doubt the media organisations themselves would not react favourably to such a requirement being imposed on them from above and this in itself creates a negative attitude to the issue.

As an alternative, a possible strategy would be for the government to bring together a number of key media and sport representatives together in a round table setting to facilitate discussion around the issue of coverage of minority sports. This would not only allow for an exchange of ideas, opinions and issues amongst these groups, but would also allow the key players to develop a strategy workable for both sides.

Leadership

Promoting Women as Leaders

While the number of strong and competent females taking on significant leadership roles within the sport and recreation sector is growing, there is little doubt women are still largely under-represented in key administration, governance, coaching, officiating and research roles. There have been many discussions around the reasons why this imbalance exists or how it has developed. However, the time for discussion around the reasons why has passed. In an effort to make a significant change at the coal face, VicSport, with funding support from the Australian Sports Commission, has over the past three years introduced two new initiatives that have focused specifically on developing women's leadership skills.

The first of these programs - the Women in Sport Community Leadership Program targets women, both paid and volunteer, who have been identified by members of the industry as potential future leaders.

The Women in Sport Community Leadership Program specifically aims to:

- Help identified women become more effective in their current roles by developing specialist work skills and knowledge
- Help identified women develop their personal leadership skills to assist them in moving on to leadership positions in the future
- Encourage these women to support other women, and the sport and recreation industry as a whole, by instilling in them an understanding of the importance of using their leadership skills to benefit the sport and recreation community as a whole.

In addition to the general skill development aspect of the program women will also be matched with a suitable mentor to help them achieve in areas they wish to develop. Participants in the program will develop general leadership abilities, as well as gain personal skills and knowledge through direct support from a mentor recognised as a leader in our industry.

Engendering in these women a sense of responsibility for the development of the industry as a whole, and encouraging them to always give back to the community will ensure the involvement of women in sport continues to grow. As these women develop their roles as leaders they will in turn become the role models who will continue to encourage those who follow in the future.

Currently 13 women are involved in this program. As the feedback below indicates the value of this program to the development of not just these individual participants, but to the future growth of women in the sector is invaluable.

“Thanks for pulling this group together; I can tell already that this will be an invaluable experience for us all. It is the efforts of women like you who are willing to give that slowly but surely make the difference others will enjoy in the future.”

The current Women’s Community Leadership program builds on VicSport’s Professional Development Workshop Series, a program run a number of years ago by VicSport, which focused on enhancing the administration, leadership and management skills of Women Sport Administrators in Regional Victoria.

As part of this program VicSport worked in conjunction with Regional Sport Assemblies and Local Government Associations to conduct workshops specifically for women across Regional Victoria to build skills in the following areas:

- Planning & Policy Development
- Good Governance

- Conducting Effective Meetings
- Volunteers and Human Resources
- Sport and the Law
- Financial Management
- Fundraising and Sports Marketing
- Ethics, Accountability and Conflict of Interest

The aim of the program was to increase the confidence of these women in their ability to perform administrative roles in their respective clubs and in turn to increase the level of professionalism in the sport industry in Victoria in general by encouraging women to take on high level roles within their clubs and organisations.

Again this program was considered highly successful in helping to up skill women and give them added confidence and self belief they required to take on more challenging leadership roles. Unfortunately, in both cases the funding provided to run these programs was not adequate to have the far reaching effects needed, and this is an ongoing problem.

While these are but two examples of excellent programs being run to help promote women into leadership roles, the reality is there is very little funding available to run such programs. Adequate funding of these programs is one way in which a significant difference can be made to encourage women into leadership roles.

The Role of Education for Women in Leadership Roles in Sport.¹

The issue of tertiary education is an area of specific interest and relevance to the debate around women in leadership roles. As sport in Australia continues on its path of increased professionalism and bureaucratisation there is a greater need for tertiary educated sport managers and sport administrators. For many young women, an undergraduate education in sport (management, coaching, human movement, physical education) can provide them with an entry point into employment in the sport industry.

At the undergraduate level, the balance between male and female students is equally spread across the various programs. These students, upon graduation, enter into the sport industry at the base level of a variety of sport organisations and in a variety of roles.

For some women, progression into senior management and administration roles in a sport organisation may mean a return to study at a post-graduate level to supplement their experience in the sport industry. Deakin University provides Australia's most established post-graduate sport management program, and data drawn from this university will be utilised in this section. At the post-graduate level of study (Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters) the gender balance appears to be considerably different to that at the undergraduate level.

Those students currently within the post-graduate sport management program are defined not only by gender, but also by experience. Male students are generally already established in their career within the sport industry, and are returning to study to gain new skills for their career development. In comparison, female students are generally young women who are either seeking employment, or early in their career who feel that they need further education to gain entry into the sport industry.

Since the development of the Master of Sport Management in 1998, there has been a substantial decrease in the percentage of female students when compared to the total student enrolment (Table 1).

Table 1: Post-graduate enrolments at Deakin University sport management program

Year	Total enrolments	Total female enrolments	% of total enrolments
1998	9	5	55.0%
1999	74	30	40.5%
2000	81	33	40.7%
2001	90	37	36.6%
2002	95	35	38.9%
2003	98	35	35.7%
2004	106	33	31.1%
2005	102	31	30.3%
2006	103	29	28.1%

Although the total number of female enrolments has largely remained stable, it is the drop in the percentage of total enrolments that requires further investigation. At this stage there may be any number of reasons for this decrease, including, but not limited to:

- Access – post-graduate study is primarily undertaken in a full-fee environment with classes held during the evenings. For many women, finding both the time and the finances to undertake post-graduate study is a substantial hurdle to overcome, particularly for those with children.
- Relevance – it is as yet unknown whether female sport managers are seeking alternative post-graduate study opportunities (e.g., MBA) or undertaking other educational programs (e.g., AICD or AIM programs).
- Aspiration to progress – anecdotally, some women in sport management and administration do not have a desire to progress beyond middle-management, and as such, post-graduate study may be less important for their career development.
- Funding opportunities – access to employer funding programs for further education is limited, primarily available through the larger sport

organisations such as the football codes. For women working in smaller sport organisations, access to funding opportunities would therefore be limited.

Research needs to be undertaken into the barriers that face women in sport management and administration positions, and the role that education may take in career progression.

Programs, such as mentoring, networking and talent identification projects need to be put in place to identify women with leadership potential who may lack the confidence or know how to gain positions in the industry.

¹: VicSport would like to thank Emma Sherry, Lecturer at Deakin University for providing this information and feedback.

Athletes as Leaders

The important issue of using athletes as leaders was also discussed. Without doubt the profile of athletes and the incredible internal dedication and drive athletes require to become successful are attributes, which for many easily lend themselves to leadership roles. When considering female athletes as leaders however it is important to recognise these women, like women from all walks of life, have varying levels of confidence in their ability to lead and it is important these women are both encouraged, and more importantly allowed to lead in a way in which they feel comfortable.

An important aspect of developing confidence in leadership, we so readily expect our athletes to take on, is providing these women with skills and knowledge in areas such as public speaking, personal interaction and personal growth and development to help build the confidence required to give back in a leadership capacity.

While these skills are sometimes provided for athletes operating at the elite level, they are rarely provided at the sub-elite level for a variety of reasons – most predominantly lack of funding. The sub-elite sporting level offers a potential pool of female leaders as yet untapped. At the sub-elite level sit a vast number of athletes who have the inherent qualities – focus, dedication and internal drive – which lend themselves easily to leaderships.

For a range of reasons however these women do not make it to the upper echelons of their sport. It is argued there is a huge potential to encourage these women who realise they are not going to make it to the top of their sport to use their skills and abilities in other leadership roles such as coaching, administration, board leadership etc.

With an injection of funding, programs such as the Women in Sport Leadership program could be extended to help better prepare our elite female athletes to become leaders, and specifically to capture the highly viable sub elite athlete level as role models.

Conclusion

This submission raises only a few of the myriad of issues having an impact on women's involvement in sport and recreation at all levels. While this submission raises some vital issues often overlooked which require further consideration, the fact all but a few issues could be covered in this submission simply highlights the need to do more at all levels, particularly at the government levels where the majority of funding and facility support is provided.

This Senate inquiry has opened the door for thought and further discussion. It is vital we build now on the opportunity this inquiry has provided and do not allow the feedback and ideas presented via submissions by all organisations to go to waste in the form of a shelved report. The lack of women's access at all levels has been an issue discussed for many years. Now is the time to stop talking and take action by providing some serious support not only for the many successful initiatives already in place, but also to allow for the development of many more.

Acknowledgment

On behalf of VicSport and the Victorian Sport and Recreation sector in general I would like to thank the following people for their contribution to this submission:

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